



GREETINGS BY

THE HONOURABLE CAROLYN SEEPERSAD-BACHAN

MINISTER OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

MP FOR SAN FERNANDO WEST

AT THE EMANCIPATION CELEBRATION FUNCTION

AV ROOM NALIS, PORT OF SPAIN

Monday 4th August, 2014

SALUTATIONS:

- Permanent Secretary, Ms. Gillian Macintyre
- Deputy Permanent Secretary, Ms. Prabha Maraj,
- MPA Family
- Good afternoon

Our Ministry does not just recognize national events but we celebrate them. We don't just acknowledge that such an event is important but we recognize not just the event but its significance to our country and its role in our national development.

Emancipation is a national event of global significance. In fact, so long as slavery exists in our world, whether it is in the trafficking of human beings or denying them their basic rights, emancipation is not just something that happened in the past but continues to be a dream for many in the present and the future.

For example, when we think of the Nigerian girls who were forcibly taken from their families and who are now slaves living in a reality that is frightening and facing a future that is even more so, we have to cherish and value the freedom that we have and that our children have.

But emancipation is a milestone in the journey to self-discovery and self-achievement. As the author Toni Morrison said, "Freeing yourself was one thing, claiming ownership of that freed self was another."

This is why our theme for today's event, "Enslavement, Freedom and Celebration" is so appropriate and resonates with all of us so many years after slavery in Trinidad and Tobago and the entire Caribbean was abolished.

Enslavement is a process that dehumanizes. It turns people into beasts of burden, and into goods and chattels to be sold, traded and killed if necessary. As Abraham Lincoln said, those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves. Or put another way, Lincoln stated, "Whenever I hear anyone arguing for slavery, I feel a strong impulse to see it tried on him personally."

But the slaves of the Caribbean, the fore-parents of most of us here today, fought for and gained their freedom. This acknowledged, in the eyes of the law and the world, their humanity, their equality, their individuality and established without doubt that we are all children of the Almighty.

We still have to fight almost every day, if not in this country of ours, but in this world in which we live for the right of equal treatment. We still have to insist that freedom is not a gift, it is a right.

Many of our great leaders and thinkers, our philosophers and poets, believe and have said that emancipation is more than a proclamation by a Government. It is a state of mind. Bob Marley, our poet, philosopher and musical genius called on us all to emancipate ourselves from mental slavery because none but ourselves can free our minds. But it means more, as Nelson Mandela said, "For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others." Or, as Mahatma Gandhi, emphasized, "Freedom is not worth

having if it does not include the freedom to make mistakes.” Sometimes we are too hard on ourselves and other people. Sometimes, we use our freedom irresponsibly and impulsively. We have to make sure that we value the freedom of others as much as we value our own.

Today’s celebration is appropriate. Today’s celebration has been earned and is deserved. It is reward and it is remembrance, but it is also a recognition of the fragility of freedom and how it is so precious that when we have it we must celebrate it. One African tribe has a saying that freedom is a thing with feathers and if you are not vigilant it will fly away.

So even in the midst of our well-earned celebration, we must think about the future and about the people everywhere who are still living in slavery.

We must always, as today, celebrate with pride and joy, with our whole hearts and souls, the freedom that we enjoy here in our country where every creed and race finds an equal place. Trinidad and Tobago must continue to be free and to value freedom and to fight against oppression wherever it exists.

As you must have seen and read, we have taken a position on the events in Palestine and will continue to oppose inhumanity and injustice. Malala is still here with us. She almost died because she wanted to go to school. That is slavery and it exists. Those little girls from Nigeria went to school and were taken away by rebels. We don’t know what eventually will be their fate, all we can do is pray that they are able to survive and triumph despite having such a terrible experience in their young lives... Much as our forefathers survived their terrible experiences of slavery, indentureship and colonialism.

Today, let us honour the achievements of those who have gone before us. Let us resolve that as we honour our history and heritage, we take ownership of the responsibility history has placed on us – to create a better inheritance for those who will come after us.

What is important is that we celebrate events like Emancipation Day together as one united nation... As one Rainbow Country. Only together can we make an even bigger impact on the world.

Today, we must think of the future, and those who will come after us. As we stand here celebrating our inheritance, what will those who will come after you stand and celebrate? What will the celebration be 100 years from now? You have an opportunity today, to shape that celebration 100 years from now.

In my own simple and humble way, and on your behalf, I say thank you to those who came, for their hard work, for their irrepressible desire and determination for freedom... For their blood, sweat and tears... For their teachings and for their relentless pursuit of the better lives that we inherited. I thank them and I pray that their souls now rest in peace.

Permit me to end with the final paragraph of Dr. Martin Luther King's speech at the foot of the Lincoln Monument in 1963. I believe even as we celebrate, we must reflect: not just on the past; not just on the future; not just in Trinidad and Tobago; but on our world... and on freedom.

We must think what it meant to modern Americans in the world's richest society, who were still strangers in a strange land. Dr. King said: "When we allow freedom to ring – when we let it ring from every city and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual:

*"Free at last, Free at last,
Great God Almighty,
We are free at last."*

May God Bless us all!

God bless this great nation of ours... Trinidad and Tobago!
Thank you.